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MONTREAL - When St. George's School of Montreal held its 80th anniversary gala evening at the L'Astral Theatre recently, the fact that this standout private primary and second institution has been a favourite choice of the Jewish community was abundantly clear.

More than 300 people were on hand for the benefit, proceeds of which went to the school's enrichment opportunities and bursary programs. School Head James Officer announced that this had culminated in a successful year, during which more than \$500,000 was taken in as part of fundraising efforts.

In every aspect of the evening's entertainment, Jewish personalities were front and centre. Jazz sensation Nikki Yanofsky, 17, who now performs around the world and has more than 10,000 Twitter followers, was the star attraction. She has attended St. George's since Grade 4 and

JAZZ SENSATION NIKKI YANOFSKY HEADLINES

Strong Jewish presence as St. George's School of Montreal celebrates 80th anniversary



PHOTO: HEIDI HOLLINGER

Nikki Yanofsky performs at a benefit for her school, St. George's.

will graduate in June. Ironically, this mark the first time she had ever done a show for her own school.

"I'm so happy to be part of this school and being able to support it," Yanofsky told student Brandon Adam

before the show as part of a St. George's TV red carpet interview. "I'm never going to forget being in St.

George's. They have been so supportive of me ever since I started singing. They are the best school ever."

High-profile Hollywood film director Shawn Levy, the man behind such hits as *Night at the Museum*, *The Pink Panther*, *Date Night* and *Cheaper By the Dozen*, was the evening's honoree. Officer announced that the school is establishing the Shawn Levy Junior Filmmaker Award.

Levy graduated in 1985 and credit's the school with giving him the necessary tools to succeed in his chosen profession.

"To me this is such an inspiring place," he remarked. "St. George's so much respects the value of the individual. The teachers from St. George's remain galvanizing people in my life."

The emcee for the evening was Andy Nulman, the Jewish head of the popular *Just For Laughs Festival*. He sent his two sons to St. George's. He was proud to introduce another alumni, Jewish

standup comic Ryan Wilner (class of 1995), who brought the house down with his clever routine. Nulman recalled that he first heard about Wilner from his sons, who claimed that there was a really funny camp counselor itching for a spot in the *Just For Laughs* lineup. As it turned out, Wilner did indeed make it to the big event.

Yet another Jewish alumni, Shira Lazar, CBSNews.com social trends and pop culture expert, brought greetings via a taped message on the big screen. There were also performances by the St. George's Glee competition team, 8 of 10 of whom are Jewish, and the 80th anniversary gala band featuring two Jewish members.

Parent Colleen Wicha chaired the event and was crowned 'Lady Gala,' complete with a Lady Gaga disguise on the big screen display.

For more about the school log on to www.stgeorges.qc.ca.

Retired music teacher Botwinik to have Yiddish concert in his honour



Retired educator and choir director David Botwinik, 90, has written scores of Yiddish songs. He will be honoured on June 17.

chords.

"I hope some of my former students are able to attend the event," Botwinik told the *Jewish Tribune*. "I know a lot of them may have wondered what happened to me. Well I am doing fine and anxious to show them."

Lou Burko, the retired music director at Shaare Zion Congregation in Montreal, calls Botwinik's book a "formidable opus" and "a musical biography of David Botwinik's life."

Botwinik retired in 1991 after a career at the Jewish People's and Peretz Schools (JPPS) and United Talmud Torahs. But working closely with Alexander, one of his three sons, who is now a Yiddish teacher at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, he has kept busy writing music and, of course, his book. He does not use a computer, so he writes everything by hand and sends it by mail to Alexander.

"I transcribed his handwritten scores onto the computer using music engraving software and painstakingly added the lyrics under the notes in both Yiddish and transliteration," Alexander explained. "I also did the book design and layout and

worked on translating the song lyrics together with my wife Naomi Cohen and my brother Leybl. Since the book came out last summer, I have continued to be involved with publicity, arranging quite a few interviews and concerts devoted to my father's music."

David Botwinik came to Canada in 1956 with his wife Silvana, who had been hidden in a church with other Italian Jews during the German occupation of Italy. The couple still live in the same home in suburban Côte Saint-Luc where they raised their daughter and three sons.

Botwinik said he is not finished yet. He plans to start working on a book about the Holocaust, including stories his own family may have not yet heard.

The Jewish Public Library, in partnership with the Montreal International Yiddish Theatre Festival at the Segal Centre for Performing Arts, presents *From Holocaust to Life* on Friday, June 17 (2 p.m.) at The Studio, Segal Centre for Performing Arts (5170 Cote Ste-Catherine Rd.). General admission is \$15. To reserve tickets, call (514) 739-7944. Info: www.jewishpubliclibrary.org or www.botwinikmusic.com.

Cunninghams don't hide their Jewish identities



The Cunninghams, known as the 'first family of rock' will perform at the hard Rock Café at Yonge and Dundas in Toronto as part of the North by North East (NXNE) Film and Music Festival.

MONTREAL - With a name like the Cunninghams, this rock/alternative/high-class rock and roll band sure does not sound like one where all of its members are Jewish. Yet Regibald, Clapsury, Pierce and Nigel Cunningham are indeed Jewish and in real life they are not at all related nor are these the identities on their birth certificates.

The Cunninghams actually include Mike Almoss (Regibald), Zachary Weinberg (Clapsbury), Mike Levine (Pierce) and Justin Abrams (Nigel). Recently the group put out a call for a fifth member, with no preference stated regarding ethnicity. It just so happens that the winning candidate, Heather Kobylwker (now Virginia Cunningham) is Jewish as well.

Recognized in Toronto as "the first family of rock," the Cunninghams came together in 2007 and clicked immediately. In April of 2008, they were the winners of the cross-

Canada Mazda Muzik Tour Contest, which gave them the opportunity to open for legendary Canadian rocker Sam Roberts to a packed Opera House in Toronto.

The band has several times taken the coveted Edge 102's street-front studios stage as part of its Steamwhistle indie music nights and are a regular at some of Toronto's most legendary venues such as the Horseshoe Tavern and El Mocambo.

In November 2008, the band released its debut album, *That Oughtta Hold 'Em*, to critical acclaim. They are currently writing a full-length album for release next fall and a new single will be unveiled shortly.

The band will perform at the Hard Rock Café, at Yonge and Dundas, on Friday, June 17 (11 p.m.) as part of the North by North East (NXNE) Film and Music Festival. Some 600 bands are participating and each one of them have been handpicked by the

organizers as part and coming artists.

"In terms of exposure this is huge," said Weinberg.

As for the name the Cunninghams and its complete lack of a Jewish connection, Abrams notes "this has turned out to be a marketable name that we use on stage, but none of us hide the fact we are Jewish. Look at the Ramones, the Beastie Boys, Fish and even Bob Dylan. These are all Jewish artists, who did not use their original names."

The Cunninghams hope to tour in the fall. While each of the members hold actual day jobs, they do indeed hope that success might one day turn this into a permanent musical gig.

For more about the group log on to their splash page at www.thecunninghamsband.com, where you can follow them on Facebook, Twitter and other social media. A revamped site is under construction.